

owned by a charity and a faceless shell company. Because there is no requirement in the United States that States keep track of the real owners of a company formed under State law, New York State only knew that the Assa Corporation was owned by another shell corporation. Ultimately, investigators were able to connect those dots and tie Iran to the structure from a clue in the corporate records kept on the Isle of Jersey.

How is that for irony? A notorious tax shelter actually had better ownership records than we have in the United States. Once Iran's investment and involvement was uncovered, the Department of Justice moved to seize and sell the building and to distribute the proceeds of that sale to American victims of Iranian-backed terror. After years of legal appeals, the victims look close to receiving this compensation.

Of course, Iran isn't the only criminal enterprise hiding behind American shell companies. Other recently uncovered examples of enterprises hiding behind American shell companies include a Mexican drug cartel using an Oklahoma corporation to launder money through a horse farm, a crime syndicate setting up a web of corporations in eight States as part of a \$100 million Medicare fraud scheme, and a human trafficking ring based in Moldova that hides their crimes behind anonymous corporations in Kansas, Missouri, and Ohio.

According to the Rhode Island State Police, corporate secrecy in my own State has complicated their investigations into real estate fraud, illegal prescription drug distribution, and sales tax evasion.

In January, just months before the Panama Papers hit the headlines, "60 Minutes" aired a segment showing just how easy it can be for criminals to hide money in the United States. The program featured an investigator with the anticorruption organization Global Witness. That investigator pretended to represent a corrupt African leader, and "60 Minutes" brought a hidden camera along into his meetings with lawyers in New York.

The investigator, presenting himself as representing the corrupt African leader, made clear that his client wanted help using suspicious funds to buy a mansion, a jet, and a yacht in the United States and to hide his ownership of these assets. Of the 16 lawyers who met with the undercover investigator, only 1 turned him away. It seems the others were comfortable helping a corrupt foreign official hide money in opaque American shell corporations.

While the underlying criminal schemes may be colorful and complex, the answer to this shell corporation problem is simple and straightforward. The Incorporation Transparency and Law Enforcement Assistance Act would direct States to require applicants forming corporations and limited liability companies to include basic in-

formation about the actual human beings who own the company.

The States would maintain and periodically update this information, and it would be available to law enforcement officers who present valid court-ordered subpoenas or search warrants. It is simple. Have each State keep track of who actually owns companies they charter and ensure that information is available for Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies through proper processes.

Transparency in business ownership is not a novel idea. Every member of the European Union will be transparent by 2017. The United Kingdom and the Netherlands have even announced plans to make their corporate ownership registries available to the public. With the light of corporate transparency about to shine on criminal assets hidden in Europe, their shell corporations will not be effective for these purposes. So that money will be looking for new dark homes.

America should take swift action to make sure these assets don't find new hidden homes in opaque American shell corporations. We are supposed to be an example to the world, not the place where the world's corrupt and the world's criminals hide their cash and their assets.

The Incorporation Transparency and Law Enforcement Assistance Act enjoys broad support from the national law enforcement community, including the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, the Fraternal Order of Police, the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, and the U.S. Marshals Service Association, as well as the Rhode Island State Police.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be able to finish my statement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Chuck Canterbury, president of the National Fraternal Order of Police, explains it this way: "When we are able to expose the link between shell companies and drug trafficking, corruption, organized crime, and terrorist finance, the law enforcement community is better able to keep America safe from these illegal activities and keep the proceeds of these crimes out of the U.S. financial system."

Of all places, the United States should not be a safe haven for criminals, foreign or domestic, to hide their illegal assets. We could take a simple major step in fighting money laundering, financial fraud, and terrorist financing by passing this bill. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to cosponsor it and to help us get it passed.

I thank the Chair. I appreciate the extra time.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

NOMINATION OF ROBERTA JACOBSON

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, it has been nearly 9 months since the United States had an ambassador to Mexico. The President's nominee to that post, Roberta Jacobson, is eminently qualified, as all of us know, to serve in that position. However, she has been waiting for the Senate to confirm her since the Foreign Relations Committee reported her nomination to the Senate in November of last year with a vote of 12 to 7.

Yesterday I took to the floor to talk about our important trade relationship with Mexico. That is not the only reason finalizing this nomination is so critical. The bilateral work on migration, security, and border issues of the United States and Mexico requires top-level leadership at our Embassy in Mexico City. It is critical for the United States to have an ambassador to ensure cooperation on border security issues and to identify threats to our national security.

We continue to engage Mexico in disrupting organized criminal networks that facilitate human trafficking. According to Mexico's National Institute of Migration, Mexico apprehended more than 190,000 migrants in 2015, including nearly 19,000 unaccompanied minors, children, better known as UACs. This is a significant increase from 2014, when 127,000 migrants, including just over 11,000 UACs, were apprehended.

It is clear these complex issues require top-level diplomacy, and we would benefit from an experienced leader who can navigate the nuances of these regional relations. In addition to these migration issues, the United States and Mexico need to address security challenges from transnational drug trafficking. As we hear all too often, we are witnessing an increase in heroin use leading to rising levels of violence and heroin-related deaths.

While the United States and Mexico are cooperating on a strategy to fight heroin, this represents a priority that requires the leadership of an ambassador. We need someone in place as our top diplomat in Mexico with experience with Mexican security and with law and to engage the most senior Mexican Government officials on the narcotics issues.

In addition, there are specific ongoing cases that necessitate having an ambassador in place to ensure that our Nation's interests are being represented. As I said yesterday, Mexico represents one of our most important bilateral relationships. It is clear the longer the United States goes without having an ambassador to Mexico, the greater our partnership will suffer.

There is simply no reason to go any longer without an ambassador to Mexico when we have someone as qualified as Roberta Jacobson. I come with good news; that is, it is my understanding that a deal—an agreement—is in the works that will ultimately lead to the

successful confirmation later this week. As such, I will not be making a unanimous consent request today, but I intend to come here as long as it takes, to keep up the pressure and to monitor this process, to ensure that it has a successful resolution.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAN

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, earlier this month, the Governor of Iran's central bank, Dr. Valiollah Seif, spoke at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington and he made three primary claims. First, he said sanctions did not, in fact, lead Iran to agree to the terms of the nuclear agreement between Iran and the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the EU, Russia, and China. He said sanctions did not force Iran to agree. Second, he said Iran's nuclear program has always been entirely peaceful. Third, he said that the United States and our European allies have not honored our commitments under the terms of the nuclear deal also known as the JCPOA.

Today I wish to push back against all three of these claims.

First, on sanctions, Governor Seif said: "Contrary to baseless allegation[s] that some people made, sanctions did not and could not force [Iran] to engage into a negotiation with our P5+1 colleague[s]," the nations I referenced.

The facts clearly say otherwise.

U.S. sanctions have been a major feature of U.S. policy toward Iran since Iran's 1979 revolution. The imposition of international sanctions and worldwide bilateral sanctions on Iran began in 2006 and increased dramatically in 2010.

In June of 2010, the Congress passed the Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, also known as CISADA, which weakened Iran's access to the international financial system and bolstered existing sanctions specifically against Iran's human rights abuse.

That same month, with the support not just of our European allies but also Russia and China, the Obama administration and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton led the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929, which created the most comprehensive and stinging international sanctions the Iranian regime has ever faced.

Two years later, in 2012, the National Defense Authorization Act designated the Central Bank of Iran for additional sanctions, which the Obama adminis-

tration successfully used to undermine Iran's ability to sell oil on world markets.

The Obama administration also convinced key allies, such as Japan, Australia, South Korea, and Canada, to agree to additional bilateral measures that increased pressure on Iran's financial banking, insurance, transportation, and energy sectors.

The effects of these coordinated sanctions were clear, swift, and direct. The value of the Iranian currency decreased dramatically. Obstacles to Iranian trade forced businesses to close and increased inflation within Iran. Iran's oil exports and government revenues declined sharply. In 2011, for example, Iran exported about 2.4 million barrels of oil per day. By March of 2014, Iran's exports were down to just 1 million barrels a day—in a nation for which petroleum makes up 80 percent of all commodity exports.

In July of 2012, former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called the sanctions regime "the most severe and strictest sanctions ever imposed on a country."

The coordinated sanctions regime was so effective that Iran's current President even described Iran's economic situation as if the country had "returned to the 19th century" under the sanctions regime. I think it is clear on this first point that sanctions imposed an unsustainable cost on Iran and forced it to the table to engage in negotiations with the West regarding its nuclear program.

That brings me to his second erroneous argument that Iran has pursued nuclear technology with only peaceful purposes in mind. Iran's actions directly contradict this claim.

In 2002, members of the international community revealed that Iran had, in fact, been attempting to build a secret uranium enrichment facility at Natanz in Central Iran and a heavy water plutonium reactor at its Arak facility in the northwestern part of the country. Only because Iran failed to keep these facilities secret did the IAEA—or the International Atomic Energy Agency—finally begin having the opportunity to monitor these sites in 2002.

In 2009, the United States, France, and Britain revealed the existence of another uranium enrichment plant buried deep under a mountain near the city of Qom.

The evidence continues. In 2011, the IAEA released a report on the "possible military dimensions" of Iran's nuclear effort, known as PMD. The report detailed areas in which the agency had evidence of Iran's past—and potentially ongoing—work on nuclear weaponization and the development of nuclear warheads for missile delivery systems.

The IAEA's final report on the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program, issued in December of 2015, found "a range of activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device were conducted in Iran

prior to the end of 2003 as a coordinated effort." The report also found that Iran conducted certain activities relevant to nuclear weaponization for at least several years after 2003 and that some of these activities didn't end until 2009.

It is not just on-the-ground reports and secret nuclear facilities that suggest that Iran's nuclear efforts have not always been entirely peaceful. Let me remind my colleagues that just last month Iran tested a ballistic missile that supposedly had a message on its side proclaiming in Hebrew: "Israel must be wiped off the Earth."

An Iranian regime that continues to advocate for the destruction of Israel, America's vital ally Israel, does not sound like a nation that has been and hopes to continue to develop nuclear technology for anything remotely peaceful.

An Iranian regime that ships illicit weapons to support the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria or the Houthi rebels in Yemen or Hezbollah in Lebanon is not seeking to develop weapons for peaceful purposes.

An Iranian regime that illegally tests dangerous ballistic missile technology—some of which is capable of carrying a nuclear weapon, all of which violates U.N. Security Council resolutions—does not have peaceful intentions.

Because of this behavior, we have every reason to distrust Iran's claims that its nuclear efforts were always peaceful. Iran continually misled the international community about the nature of its nuclear program, and it continually disguised its efforts to conduct research and other activities to help it better understand how to develop a nuclear weapon. It continues to threaten Israel, to test ballistic missiles, and to support terrorism throughout the Middle East.

That is why I simply cannot accept Seif's argument that Iran's nuclear program has always been entirely peaceful.

The third claim made by Seif last week was that the United States and our European allies have not honored our obligations under the nuclear deal known as the JCPOA. Iran's evidence for this claim is that the sanctions relief granted to Iran for complying with the terms of the agreement hasn't suddenly unleashed a flurry of Iranian economic activity. As Adam Szubin, our own Department of the Treasury's Acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, recently put it, throughout the negotiations between the United States, our allies, partners, and Iran, the U.S. and our allies "did not guarantee economic outcomes, or a flood of immediate business into Iran."

Acting Under Secretary Szubin is right. Iran is responsible for making Iran an attractive, safe place to do business. For many individuals and businesses, Iran appears neither attractive nor safe. For example, in October,